



International Forum for the Challenges of Peace Operations

Civilian Protection in Mindanao Conflict - An Emerging Consensus

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The people of Mindanao in Southern Philippines have been suffering the effects of violent conflict for over 30 years, at a cost of at least 120,000 dead, and the displacement of an estimated two million people. There have been peace agreements, in particular the agreement between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in 1996, but these agreements have failed to secure a lasting peace. At present, the government is negotiating an interim agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) despite the hurdles in achieving a politically-negotiated final peace agreement with Muslim rebel groups that had waged, because of colonization and political assimilation, genuine assertion of the Bangsamoro peoples' right to self-determination, to say the least.

But, to say at the very least, we, the peoples of Mindanao, had surpassed the best and worst of times in our history. The conflicts, which shattered the foundations of our united communal relationship, diverse cultures, and inter-religious dynamics, became the source for our inspiration to move on, to dwell in our faith, and to keep on believing—that in situations of conflict we can still work as peoples of Mindanao—women, men, children, internally displaced persons, and elderly—united in a common spirit of diversity and commonness.

Allow me therefore to highlight emerging issues and need for immediate action for ensuring civilian and humanitarian protection in the context of the Mindanao conflict.

Following the October 27, 2009 agreed framework on Civilian Protection Component of the International Monitoring Team, the Mindanao Peoples Caucus initiated the drafting of the operational guidelines for all members of the Civilian Protection Protection Component (CPC) including its scope of work and areas of operation, membership, tasks and responsibilities. This in reference to the Terms of Reference (TOR) agreed by the negotiating parties of the Government of Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) that includes CPC in the expanded IMT.

- A. Support authorities who have the formal duty and mandate to ensure the safety and security of communities, including all non-combatants.
 - Conduct investigative missions and submit reports on cases involving coercion, deprivation, and violence against civilians;

- Conduct regular monitoring of war affected communities including evacuation centers;
- Conduct quick response^[1] during emergency situations;
- Provide proactive presence to deter threats of violence, deprivation, and coercion to civilians; and

Coordinate with the Security Component of the IMT in conducting clearing operations regarding Unexploded Ordnance, etc.

B. Monitor the compliance of the Parties' commitment to respect the sanctity of mosques, churches and religious places, including schools, hospitals and all places of civilian nature.

- Monitor, document and report civilian areas for specific cases of violations of the above mentioned;
 - Coordinate with school leaders, religious leaders, those in the community key to protection efforts; and
 - Make appropriate referral to relevant bodies and authorities for remedial actions to be provided, including follow-ups;

C. Monitor compliance of international standards of fair, equitable, and just conduct of relief efforts in communities affected by conflict in Mindanao.

- Monitor relief operations so that they are conducted fairly and without negative outside interventions or interferences;
- Perform regular and immediate assessments of IDP needs and communicate to the parties in the peace process and relevant relief and humanitarian agencies;
- Assist and accompany returning IDPs safely back to their respective communities;
- Provide timely and accurate information to the IDPs so they can have informed decisions on whether to return, resettle or reintegrate;
- Monitor IDPs and their needs after their resettlement and provide proactive presence when necessary; and
- **Coordinate validation of data on IDPs.**

D. To provide CPC protective presence in order to prevent violence in vulnerable communities.

- Provide regular mobile monitoring and protective presence in

the most vulnerable communities, especially in buffer zones or other volatile areas, working closely with people at risk and always in close coordination with the formal ceasefire mechanisms; and

- Provide accurate and timely information on the conflict dynamics and prevent spreading of rumors and disinformation.

E. To strengthen the connections and information-sharing among stakeholders:

- Facilitate regular dialogues and briefings on protection issues with the local government units, paramilitaries and police, civil society organisations and communities, to address violations, grievances and progress in the civilian protection work.

Even before the passage of Republic Act 9851 or otherwise known as the “Philippine Act on Crimes Against International Humanitarian Law, Genocide and Other Crimes Against Humanity,” MPC has initiated efforts and supported campaigns in pursuing the objectives of the new law.

In end note, allow me by saying that peace is achievable in Mindanao. Because we, the people—Muslims, Christians, and indigenous peoples-- yearn for it after centuries of struggles, after centuries of deprivation, after centuries of alienation, after centuries of colonization. But we will triumph because we have faith—in reconciliation, in dialogue, and in peace.

Daghang salamat ug ipadayon ang pakigbisog natong tanan!